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ABSTRACT

Based on James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier's novel "My Brother Sam Is Dead," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that one way to learn about the past is to read historical novels; and that some people take one side or another in a war or other conflict, and some find themselves caught in the middle. The main activity of the lesson involves students writing and performing a monologue in the persona of one of the colonists in the story, which takes place during the American Revolution. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN: The Revolutionary War

LENGTH OF LESSON: One class period

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

SUBJECT AREA: U.S. History

CREDIT: Wendy Buchberg, instructional technology support specialist, Corning–Painted Post Area School District, Corning, New York, and Schuyler Chemung Tioga BOCES, Elmira, New York.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. One way to learn about the past is to read historical novels.

2. Some people take one side or another in a war or other conflict; some people find themselves caught in the middle.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

Copies of the young adult novel *My Brother Sam Is Dead* by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier

Optional: audiotaping and videotaping equipment

PROCEDURE:

1. This project is designed to help students see that in every war there are many viewpoints to consider; the issues involved are seldom cut and dried. Tell students they are going to read a novel that underscores the preceding statement.

2. Introduce the young adult historical novel *My Brother Sam Is Dead* by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier. It tells the story of young Tim Meeker, the brother of a Revolutionary War soldier. Tim is caught between his sibling's rebel beliefs and his father's attempts to stay neutral in a Tory town.

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3. While they are reading the novel, suggest that students keep lists of reasons that both men, the brother and the father, give for the positions they take.

4. After reading and discussing the novel, ask your students to imagine themselves in Tim's place or as someone else who has a good vantage point for assessing the conflict—for example, a soldier's spouse or parent, a doctor or nurse, or a munitions maker's apprentice. Would they feel and act as Tim does—or differently?

5. Challenge your students to write a monologue in the persona of the colonist they have imagined. In the monologue, each student must explain his or her unique perspective on the complex events unfolding. Each monologue should show that the sibling, spouse, parent, or other observer is noticing the details about a war that those caught up in the fighting or in supporting the king might overlook or not see objectively.

6. Give your students several options for presenting their monologues, each of which should begin with the speaker's statement of who he or she is pretending to be. Options include the following:

- A live performance before the class
- An audiotape recording
- A videotape recording
- A reader's theater presentation (with simple props and sound effects)

7. Involve the audience in critiquing each presentation.

ADAPTATIONS:

Students can read more sophisticated historical novels or short stories set in the Revolutionary War period.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Consider the role of communication in determining the progression and outcome of a war. Compare the means of communication available in the 1700s to the technology available today. Then discuss how the outcome of the Revolutionary War might have been different with today's communication tools.

2. Strong individuals are usually a key factor in determining the strategies of a war. Compare the leadership qualities of a Revolutionary War figure such as George Washington with those of figures in some prominent conflicts today, such as Slobodan Milosevic and Yasser Arafat. What similarities can you find in their strategies and leadership qualities, if any? What differences do you notice?

3. Landownership in England differed from landownership in the colonies. Land was more available in the colonies, so more colonists were landowners—in England, only 1 in 10 people owned land, but in New England, 9 out of 10 people were landowners. In what ways might this difference have contributed to rebellious sentiments on the part of the colonists?

4. What are some of the reasons that countries and colonies seek independence? Are any of these reasons more important than others? Think about some of the "hot spots" around the world where people are currently seeking independence from a controlling government. What issues underlie these conflicts? Are they similar to the issues that led the American colonists to revolt against the English government? How?

5. The Stamp Act of 1765 required that every piece of paper sold in the colonies—from pamphlets to playing cards—have a revenue stamp on it. This revenue stamp could only be obtained by paying tax on the paper item. The colonists found this system unfair since the stamps were expensive, so they sought to have the Stamp Act repealed. More than two centuries after the passage of the Stamp Act, however, taxes are still a major preoccupation (and frustration) for many people in the United States. Evaluate the following kinds of taxes, balancing their fairness with the degree of revenue they bring in: income, import/export, gasoline, cigarette, sales, property, school, entertainment, and hospitality.

6. We use the word *revolution* in many contexts—think of the Industrial Revolution, for example, or the technological revolution. In reality, though, what makes a revolution a revolution? What distinguishes a revolution from mere widespread change? Brainstorm and list the criteria for a revolution, and define it in political, economic, and social terms.

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate your students' presentations using the following three-point rubric:

Three points: coherent and unified monologue with clear thesis statement; excellent speaking and nonverbal techniques (gesturing, eye contact, and so on)

Two points: mostly coherent and unified monologue with adequate thesis statement; good speaking and nonverbal techniques (gesturing, eye contact, and so on)

One point: monologue weak in coherence, unity, and thesis statement; poor speaking and nonverbal techniques (gesturing, eye contact, and so on)

You can ask students to contribute to the assessment rubric by identifying nonverbal techniques.

EXTENSION:

A Second Declaration of Independence
If your students have had a chance to study the Declaration of Independence, now give them an opportunity to read or reread Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in light of the declaration. Ask students to comment on how the later document reflects the earlier one. What does Garry Wills, the historian and writer, mean when he says the address marks a refounding of America?

Historical Marker
Ask students to choose a battle between the British and the Americans. Direct them to create a historical marker for the battle site so that others may learn about what happened there. The minimum information that students should include on the plaque is name of the place, number of dead, names of leaders, and results of the battle.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

If You Were There In 1776
by Barbara Brenner, Bradbury, 1994.
ISBN 0-02-712322-7; LC 93-24060

The American Revolution: Opposing Viewpoints
William Dudley, editor, Greenhaven, 1992.
Explores the causes, conduct and participants of the American Revolution.

WEB LINKS:

George Washington's Mount Vernon
The home of George Washington includes some great lesson material dealing with Washington, as well as a brief online tour of Mount Vernon.
http://www.mountvernon.org/

From Revolution to Reconstruction
This is a well-done hypertext book on American History. Select the *War for Independence*. You can go directly to a copy of *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, compare copies of Jefferson's rough draft of the Declaration of Independence with the final copy and explore a host of other hyperlinked topics of the Revolutionary War.
http://www.let.rug.nl/~welling/usa/revolution.html

VOCABULARY:

tyrannical
The arbitrary use of power by a ruler with absolute power.
Context:
They would not adhere to the tyrannical system their forefathers fled.

stifle
To keep or hold back.
Context:
They did not want to stifle their economic development.

debt
Something owed, such as money, goods or services.
Context:
They have an enormous war debt.

boycott
To stop from using, buying, or dealing with as an act of protest.
Context:
The colonists boycotted British goods.

allies
A union or confederation between governments in a common cause.
Context:
They were allies.

chaos
A condition of total disorder or confusion.
Context:
In the chaos, the British charged forward blindly thrusting their bayonets and ignoring their officers shouts to fall in.

siege
The surrounding of a town or fortress by an army trying to capture it.
Context:
The winds of war first stirred in the Boston area during the siege of Boston and the Battle of Breed's Hills.

rebellion
An uprising intended to change or overthrow an existing form of government.
Context:
General Gage had asked parliament for 20,000 more troops to suppress the rebellion.

redoubt
A small, usually temporary defensive work.
Context:
The Rebels waited while the enemy neared the redoubt.

alliances
A formal union or confederation between governments in a common cause.
Context:
The colonies could negotiate alliances and receive aid.

resolution
A formal statement of a decision.
Context:
After nine hours the Congress passed the resolution for independence.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 6-8

Subject Area: United States History

Standard: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

Benchmarks: Understands how political and religious ideas joined economic interests to bring about the "shot heard round the world" (e.g., interests and positions of Loyalists, Patriots, and other groups; resistance to imperial policy; the English tax on the colonists to help pay for the Seven Years War).

Grade Level: 6-8

Subject Area: United States History

Standard: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

Benchmarks:
Understands the creation of the Declaration of Independence (e.g., major principles set forth, historical antecedents that contributed to the document, individuals who struggled for independence).

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: United States History

Standard: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

Benchmarks:
Understands the social, political, and religious aspects of the American Revolution (e.g., opponents and defenders of England's new imperial policy; decisions leading to crisis of revolution; efforts by Parliament and colonies to prevent revolution; ideas of different religions; economic and social differences of Loyalists, Patriots, and neutrals).

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: United States History

Standard: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

Benchmarks:
Understands how other writings influenced the ideas of the Declaration of Independence and how other government documents compare to it (e.g., influence of John Locke's Two Treatises on Government and how it compares to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen).

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
Join host Charles Kuralt for a searing portrait of the struggle that forged our nation. From the first rebellion of the farmers against the redcoats to the final victory at Yorktown, relive the saga in all its drama.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⓟ

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
The Revolutionary War

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. Land ownership in England differed from land ownership in the American colonies. What was the biggest difference?

2. Why did England not exercise strict control over the American colonies in the beginning?

3. Why did England want the American colonies to help pay the war debt incurred from the French and Indian War?

4. What did the Stamp Act of 1765 require?

5. Why did British Commander Gage send 800 troops to Concord, Massachusetts?

7. Why did the British maintain their formations, which made them easy targets, as they marched back to Boston after the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

8. Why did General Gage want a frontal assault on Breed's Hill?

9. What did the Battle of Breed's Hill prove to the colonists?

10. Who were the five members of the committee formed by the Continental Congress to write a declaration of independence and who created the first draft?

11. Where did Thomas Jefferson get some of the ideas for the Declaration of Independence?

12. How did George Washington remind the Continental Congress of his military experience?

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The Revolutionary War

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Land ownership in England differed from land ownership in the American colonies. What was the biggest difference?
Land was more available in the colonies so more colonists were landowners. In England, only one in ten persons owned land; in New England, nine out of ten people were land owners.

2. Why did England not exercise strict control over the American colonies in the beginning?
England did not exercise strict control over the colonies because it did not want to stifle the colonial economic growth.

3. Why did England want the American colonies to help pay the war debt incurred from the French and Indian War?
England thought the colonies should help pay the debt because British troops which were supplied to the colonies expelled the French from North America.

4. What did the Stamp Act of 1765 require?
The Stamp Act of 1765 required that every piece of paper sold in the colonies -- pamphlets to playing cards -- have a revenue stamp. This revenue stamp could only be obtained by paying tax on that item.

5. Why did British Commander Gage send 800 troops to Concord, Massachusetts?
Gage sent troops to Concord to capture the weapons, ammunition and supplies stored there by the Massachusetts Militia.

7. Why did the British maintain their formations, which made them easy targets, as they marched back to Boston after the Battle of Lexington and Concord.
According to historians, the British stayed in their formations as they marched back to Boston because they believed it kept their military strength intact.

8. Why did General Gage want a frontal assault on Breed's Hill?
General Gage ordered a frontal assault on Breed's Hill to reassert the superiority of the British regular troops over the colonial militia.

9. What did the Battle of Breed's Hill prove to the colonists?
The Battle of Breed's Hill proved that the colonial militia could fight like an army and withstand the British Army in formal battle.

10. Who were the five members of the committee formed by the Continental Congress to write a declaration of independence and who created the first draft?
The five members of the committee asked to write a declaration of independence were Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, John Adams, Robert Livingston and Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson created the first draft.

11. Where did Thomas Jefferson get some of the ideas for the Declaration of Independence?
Thomas Jefferson borrowed some of the ideas in the Declaration of Independence from George Mason and John Locke.

12. How did George Washington remind the Continental Congress of his military experience?
Washington dressing in the uniform that he had worn during the French and Indian War.

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